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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the conflicts between communities and schools that occur as change and reform activities are implemented. The discussion (1) describes the nature of the relationship between educational organizations and the local (and more remote) environment; (2) suggests conditions that may cause the relationship between schools and local communities to become conflicted when changes are introduced; (3) illustrates the key issues with examples from the change literature--particularly recent studies of federally sponsored change in rural areas; and (4) suggests some possible implications for research and practice. (Author)

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BEYOND IMPLEMENTATION:

REFORM AND SCHOOL-COMMUNITY CONFLICT

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by

Terrence E. Deal

Introduction

For the past two decades, educational organizations in the public sector have engaged intensively in a diverse set of activities with three general labels: change, innovation, reform. These activities have been stimulated from a variety of sources: (1) locally by teachers, administrators, parents, or community "needs", (2) professionally by consultants, packaged "innovations", or new ideas, and (3) externally by state legislatures, courts, and various agencies of the federal government. The activities have been undertaken for a variety of reasons: some changes have been optional efforts to respond to a need or to create something better; others have been encouraged by monetary incentives or other opportunities; still other changes or reforms have been mandated or required. The activities have been aimed at a variety of "targets": changes have been sought at all levels of educational organizations - classrooms, schools or districts. Within levels, practices and procedures, roles, relationships, attitudes, behavior, goals, norms and almost every conceivable aspect of organizational life have been "targeted" for change.

Whatever the source, motivation, or target, several problems have accompanied the activities of the past two decades. One problem is that intended objectives are not always reached. Following an initial

flurry of activity, classrooms, schools, or districts are often left the same as they were before the activity began (Baldridge and Deal, 1975; Charters and Jones, 1975; Goodlad, 1976). For a variety of reasons, changes seem to get swallowed, coopted, or compromised in the process of "implementation" - as plans move into action (Berman and McLaughlin, 1975). Another problem is that even when changes pass successfully through the internal implementation "maze", unintended external consequences often leave teachers, administrators, parents, or entire communities confused and in turmoil. Conflict escalates, morale drops, teachers and administrators leave - willingly or otherwise, and the community questions its commitment to education - an inquiry often reflected in long board meetings or defeated tax election (Hampson, 1975; Herriott and Gross, 1979).

To date, the literature on change in educational organizations has attended mainly to the internal difficulties involved in implementing change: non-implementation, symbolic, ritualistic, or superficial conformity, or cooptation. The paper emphasizes the problems which arise between schools and local communities when certain changes are "implementated" as planned.

In the field of organizational studies, consensus is finally beginning to emerge around a statement that many practitioners have echoed for years: educational organizations are unique social collectives (Weick, 1976; March and Olsen, 1976). Internally, instructional and administrative activities are usually "buffered" from one another (Deal, Meyer and Scott, 1975). Externally,

schools* are imbedded in local communities that exercise formal control over relatively superficial "categories" but provide teachers and administrators considerable latitude in carrying out many important activities (Meyer and Rowan, 1978). From these patterns, two implications for change seem clear. Where changes increase formal contact between administrators and teachers (or among teachers) conflict will probably occur. Conflict is also likely to occur where changes involve "categories" which communities control or which undermine the existing "contract" between school and community. This paper focuses on the conflicts between communities and schools that occur as change and reform activities are implemented. The discussion will (1) describe the nature of the relationship between educational organizations and the local (and more remote) environment; (2) suggest conditions which may cause the relationship between schools and local communities to become conflicted when changes are introduced; (3) illustrate the key issues with examples from the change literature - particularly recent studies of federally-sponsored change in rural areas and; (4) suggest some possible implications for research and practice.

Relationships Between Schools and the Environment

Historically, educational organizations in America have "symbiotic" relationships with local communities in which they are imbedded. Communities provide students and various resources. In return, schools provide

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* Educational organizations have different levels. One level is the district whose environment is an entire community. The other level is a specific school which usually relates to a specific sector of of the local community. In the paper the term school will be used as a general term to refer to either level - or both.

instruction, a place for community activities, a source of community pride, and an important symbol around which local controversy and debate often takes place. Educational organizations are governed and controlled by local communities, a fact which makes them highly vulnerable to local politics and influence (Miles, 1975; Sieber, 1975).

But control of educational organizations by local communities is not all-encompassing; it centers around peripheral categories or boundary conditions (Meyer and Rowan, 1978). In each community, a "contract" (often implicit) is established between the local community and the schools. The contract specifies where attention will be focused and where control will be exerted.

Typically, attention of local communities centers around: (1) physical characteristics: attractive, well-maintained buildings with integral features such as an administrative suite, classrooms, a library, and the "artifacts" of education -books, blackboards, desks, and flags; (2) curriculum: a sequence of topics and materials which integrate both local values or goals and modern pedagogical techniques; (3) certification: credentialled teachers and administrators, accredited programs, age-grade placement for students, grades, diplomas, and other evaluation rites and symbols; (4) the appearance of order: precision bands, well-groomed students, homework, discipline codes, and assistant principals; and (5) collateral services: winning athletic teams, space for local activities, occasional drama, seasonal ceremonies and pagents, and leisure activities for adults. (See Meyer and Rowan, 1978; Burlingame, 1978).

When these areas "pass muster" with parents and local residents, a "logic of confidence" prevails and teachers and administrators are granted

a professional "license" (Meyer and Rowan, 1978; Firestone, 1977). The professional "license" provides considerable latitude to administrators and teachers. Superintendents have ample discretion in administering districts, principals have freedom to establish the climate and tailor activities of schools, and teachers are given almost total jurisdiction within classrooms (Cohen, et al. 1979). While communities control the peripheral "categories" of education, professionals - especially teachers - control instruction. As long as the contract between the local community and professionals is observed, educational organizations are entrusted to professionals who are given considerable latitude in designing, carrying out, and evaluating instructional activity.

To maintain and protect the license, continual vigilance must be devoted to the organizational "face" projected toward the local community. The "vigil" often becomes a "tightrope" since many communities have multiple constituencies, each with different expectations and values. Conforming to the terms of the contract is crucial and shifts (or contradictions) in local expectations or values must be quickly reflected without violating other obligations and constraints. Demands for accountability must be incorporated without creating problems between teachers and administrators. Humanistic ideas must be reflected without undermining order or credentialing. Fiscal restraint must be exercised without cutting important collateral services. If the terms are violated or if emerging local expectations are not incorporated, conflict will erupt, the professional license will be revoked and the community will increase the jurisdiction of local control. A vicious cycle is thus set in motion: when community attention begins to center on instructional

activity, contradictions and inconsistencies are exposed since the technology of instruction is inherently weak. This produces further conflict and control until a new contract is established - or other professionals are returned to which community faith can again be given. In sum, the relationship between schools and communities is complicated, fragile, and easily jeopardized.

A potential problem arises because not only are local communities complex, they (and schools) do not exist in isolation from other influences. A professional community (R and D centers, professors) produces new ideas about appropriate pedagogical techniques - open classrooms, individualized instruction or differentiated staffing. State and federal governments provide financial incentives for new programs - Title III, Title IV-C, The Experimental Schools Program, California's Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program. In addition, state and federal agencies mandate certain reforms - Title IX, desegregated schools, or new evaluation techniques such as P.P.B.S. or M.B.O.

Remote influences often exert pressures or require changes which jeopardize the existing contract between schools and the local community. Administrators and teachers thus face a dilemma of conforming to professional norms or legislative rules or violating the contract with the local community. Violation of the contract may produce conflict and endanger the logic of confidence, professional license, and local support. Where changes are externally mandated - such as Title IX or court-ordered desegration - the dilemma becomes even more acute. Teachers and administrators are caught in a no-win situation. Implementing a change may

endanger local community support and good will. Failure to implement the change may incur external sanctions.

Conditions Which Promote School-Community Conflict

Not all change and reform activities create conflict between schools and local communities. In communities where the professional license is valid, individual teachers frequently and rather easily adopt or discard instructional practices - as long as the act of adding or deleting does not violate a boundary condition. The professional community - through journals, consultants, and materials - is continually generating new ideas. Such ideas - diagnosis and prescription, individualized instruction, behavioral modification - flow without interruption through many classrooms.

Districts and schools can easily change practices and procedures which fall within the scope of the existing school community contract. New accounting procedures which fulfill a community mandate for frugality and accountability should not engender conflict or resistance. Neither should workshops which are designed to train teachers in new instructional approaches or create new levels of awareness about discrimination among the sexes.

Where discrepencies exist between local agendas and wider reform agendas, schools and districts often avoid conflicts by conforming ceremoniously or ritualistically or by limiting changes to institutional or structural levels of the organization (Charters and Jones, 1975). Changes in important categories or behavior which may jeopardize the contract with the local community are thus avoided. As examples: Title

IX regulations yield Title IX officers, workshops, and reports. Rigorous evaluation requirements produce research and evaluation units and revised evaluation forms. (See case studies in Davis, et al. 1977.) Requirements of citizen participation produce steering bodies, ad hoc committees, and parent councils. But few changes are made in actual behavior. And little effort is expended in linking these groups or activities with others. In most communities, such changes will not produce conflict - unless some idiocyncratic provision of the school-community "pact" has been breached.

Conflicts develop when changes violate some aspect of the existing bond between the local community and schools. Problems erupt for several reasons:

1. Important obligations are undermined - discipline breaks down, physical characteristics change, collateral services are interrupted, or the curriculum sequence is altered or drifts away from local values. An individualized reading program may produce an appearance of a breakdown in order and discipline. Open-space architecture and and team teaching may violate existing norms about the physical characteristics of schools.

2. Constraints are violated - new topics are introduced, new textbooks contain controversial material, too much money is spent, outside funds raise the spector of federal "interference". A course in sex education may encroach upon parental perogatives. Workshops on sex biases can suggest that schools are trying to indoctrinate "foreign" values. A consultant retained to conduct a management survey may be perceived as too costly.

3. The professional license or logic of confidence is undermined- new evaluation practices "expose" incompetent teachers, community aides or volunteers "leak" information about bizzare or ineffective classroom techniques, conflicts between specialists or teachers spill over into the community, accreditation is removed at the local high school. The logic of confidence can be jeopardized in two ways: changes create an appearance which is incongruent with prevailing community norms or changes remove the "buffers" between administrators and teachers, parents and the classroom, or teachers and specialists thus creating internal turmoil which "spills" into the local community.

When changes violate the existing contract between school and community conflicts will likely develop. And, several different strategies can be employed to deal with conflict: flight, diplomacy, problem-solving, negotiation or power plays (Derr, 1978). Sometimes, conflict between schools and communities will be open and directed at a specific issue. More often, however, conflict will be subterranean, diffuse, and directed at several issues - many of which are not directly relevant. Parents worried about team teaching raise concerns about classroom discipline; boosters worried about the effect of Title IX on local athletics focus on the incompetence of the superintendent; residents concerned about new textbooks complain about taxes and join together to defeat a tax election.

As conflict begins to develop around a specific change, issues will sometimes be brought to the attention of administrators by parents or local residents. Generally, the administrative strategy will be to

smooth over or avoid the conflict (Deal and Nutt, forthcoming). Left alone, the conflict may come; it also may fester and erupt in displays of power. If the conflict arises around changes which violate a pivotal part of the contract between school and community, power strategies will quickly evolve. Board members will receive telephone calls, ad hoc groups will form, school board meetings will become forums for complaints and issues, school board elections will be contested, the positions of administrators will become less secure, and superintendents will often be fired. Through these power strategies, the contract between the local community and schools will be reaffirmed and the changes which violated key provisions will probably be undermined or dropped.

In sum, many changes and reforms promoted from within or outside schools will not produce conflict between schools and the local community. Conflict will arise around changes which, in any way, violate the existing agreements (explicit or implicit) which govern the school-community relationship. Power strategies will often be used to resolve the conflict. And with control vested ultimately in the community, changes undesirable to the local community will be undermined or aborted. Although a new contract will be established between the school and community, desirable changes may be lost, considerable time and energy will be expended, professional careers will be damaged, and energy may be temporarily diverted from important instructional services. Problems are particularly difficult when changes are mandated by state or federal agencies. Further conflicts may develop between local and external agencies as local communities attempt to "purge" changes that are legally required and imposed.

Illustrations from the Experimental Schools Program

Within the change and innovation literature there are many illustrations of school-community conflict. Hampson (1975), for example, documents the intense conflict between a school and the local community which developed over an internally stimulated move to switch the junior high social studies curriculum from European history to American Political Behavior. As a less direct example, the Environment for Teaching's study of elementary school districts in the San Francisco Bay area, showed that close collaboration between specialists and teachers was correlated significantly with perceptions of school-community conflict. Similarly, in schools with large numbers of closely-knit teaching teams, conflict between district and school was reported as particularly high (unpublished analyses, Environment for Teaching, CERAS, 1975).

But perhaps the richest source illustrating school-community conflicts resulting from change activities can be found in case studies of rural school districts that participated in the Experimental Schools program (Burno, 1979; Clinton, 1977; Calfer and Calfer, 1977; Donnelly, 1978; Firestone, 1977; Henigh, 1978; Messerschmidt, 1978; Standal, 1978). The Experimental Schools Program was designed to bring about comprehensive change in small rural school districts (Herriott and Gross, 1979). From 1972-75, ten school districts were given federal money to support specific, locally developed changes (in response to federal guidelines). The effort was thus a federally-encouraged effort which provided monetary incentives to stimulate change.

From a synthesis of the nine case studies, and a review of cross-

site analyses (Rosenbloom and Louis, 1979) there is ample evidence of school-community conflicts across the small districts (Deal and Nutt, forthcoming). The illustrations come from rural school districts participating in a federally encouraged reform effort. Nevertheless, several issues are illustrated in those case studies and may be more widely applicable.

First, conflicts between schools and the community are most evident in those districts which had the highest implementation "scores", i.e., changed the most. Further, these conflicts rarely surfaced as changes were planned - even though the local community was extensively involved. The conflicts developed in the implementation phase as the changes became visible.

Second, many of the specific "components" of change agenda within districts were implemented without producing conflicts with the community. Most often, these easily implemented components were closely related to existing practices, were additions which added to activities within the districts existing obligations (i.e., collateral services) or were additions which did not violate existing "constraints" or encroach upon the communities "turf".

Third, specific components which violated the existing contract between schools and community - new topics, modern approaches to discipline, attempts to get students involved in the community or parents involved in the school produced sustained conflict between schools and the community. These conflicts often resulted in dropping the innovations, reducing the power of the administrator to implement the innovation, or firing the superintendent.

Fourth, not only did changes produce conflict between schools and communities, some specific components attracted already existing issues and conflicts. The change thus provided a new arena for old antagonisms.

Fifth, efforts by administrators to "intrude" on the territory of teachers by advocating and monitoring new instructional practices often created school-community conflict indirectly. In small communities, teachers would "leak" information to parents about the project - "do you know what the ES Program is doing to your kids?" This internal conflict quickly spread to the community leading to direct - and sustained - confrontations between parents or residents and administrators.

Sixth, strategies to manage or resolve conflict were generally power strategies. Across case studies in the rural school districts, tax elections were defeated, board members were recalled, administrators were fired, and considerable time and energy was expended in community debates and collective "plots". The exercise of power was usually an attempt to undermine, block, or get rid of a change which violated the existing pact between schools and the community.

Seventh, in a few districts, conflicts between schools and communities were managed through negotiation and bargaining strategies. Where such approaches to conflict were used there was some indication that the existing school-community contract was renegotiated thereby resulting in a willingness to support changes - often with local funds when federal resources were stopped.

Case studies from these rural school districts illustrate the dynamics of conflict which can erupt between schools and communities when change activities are implementated. In some respects, the cases

are atypical: small rural districts, federally encouraged change, large financial incentives, and long-term commitments. But, many of the same issues will probably emerge in urban or suburban districts, changing under federal or state mandate, with limited financial incentives.

Implications for Research

Focusing attention beyond implementation to potential conflicts between school and local communities produced by change and reform activities is important to understanding the dynamics of change in educational organizations. In the past, there has often been a strong coalition between federal and state agencies, the professional community, and administrators (or teachers) in establishing how schools should be different. As a result, financial incentives and mandated reforms often reflect and attempt to impose "ideas in good currency" on schools within local communities. At the same time, there is ample anecdotal evidence that across communities the legitimacy of education organizations and a willingness to support schools is declining. Whether these two events are connected requires data that go beyond the scope of this paper. But, assuming that there is a relationship between imposing change and reform agenda (developed elsewhere) on local communities and the downtrend in legitimacy and support, several key questions seem worthy of future exploration and study.

First, what is the nature of the relationship between schools and the local community? Meyer and Rowan (1978) suggest that this relationship is built on a logic of confidence which provides both community control and professional autonomy in organizational settings where it is difficult to determine results and to establish linkages between means

and ends. Specifying more carefully the relationship between schools and communities across diverse settings would provide useful insights in understanding educational organizations.

Second, around what specific changes or reforms will conflict between schools and communities develop? The Experimental Schools research suggests that there are predictable areas of conflict which may transcend unique characteristics of individual districts. Conflicts may develop around areas which are part of the existing contract between schools and communities (constraints or obligations) or areas where professional-community jurisdiction are either ambiguous or contested. As part of this inquiry, the conditions under which internal "turf" disputes between teachers and administrators will spread to the local community might be explored.

Third, how are conflicts between schools and communities resolved? From the ES rural school districts, the predominant strategies for managing or resolving conflict are flight, diplomacy, or power. Collaborative, problem solving activities are rare as is negotiation or bargaining. Some preliminary evidence and speculation, however, leads to the proposition that negotiation or bargaining between school and community constituencies may provide a forum for renegotiating a "contract" which specifies new constraints, obligations, and expectations. Understanding how and why this process works may provide a fruitful avenue for understanding how changes can be adapted and institutionalized.

Implications for Change and Reform Efforts

1. Schools are imbedded in local communities and establish - either implicitly or explicity - agreements which govern the relationship and specify mutual obligations and constraints.

2. Change and reform activities, often stimulated by professional or legislative influences may threaten the existing contract thus producing school-community conflict. Anticipating these conflicts is an important part of an implementation strategy. Some changes - within the scope of the professional license or compatible with existing obligations and constraints - will not produce conflict between schools and community. Change or reforms that run counter to the pact between school and community will produce sustained conflict and power plays. Knowing where problems can be expected, where the path will be easy, and where ritual conformity may be in order may help to avoid excessive turmoil and maintain the support of the local community.

3. When conflicts are unavoidable between reform agenda and school-community contracts, it may be beneficial to create arenas where bargaining and negotiation can take place. Differences between skills, interests, and energy of professionals and parents or community residents may violate conditions for successful problem-solving. By creating forums for bargaining it may be possible to renegotiate the "bond" between community and school thus adapting changes to local conditions without causing undue turmoil and strong reaction.

Conclusion

Studies of implementation have often focused on the dynamics inside educational organizations which facilitate or provide barriers to change. Equally important, however, is the potential reaction of local communities

to those changes that survive internal conflicts and resistance. Change and reform can jeopardize the "contract" governing the relationship between communities and schools. When the contract is violated conflict results which, if not managed properly, can result in a reduction of a community to support it's schools. Since local control and support is essential to continue operation, changes and reforms (either developed internally or externally) that ignore this possibility contribute to undermining the legitimacy of public schools. Change efforts that recognize and deal directly with school-community conflict may greatly increase the potential success of an innovation.

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